



## EVEN ON THE 'NICE LIST,' MANY KIDS WILL STILL MISS OUT THIS CHRISTMAS

**Opinion piece: The hardest time of year for children in poverty** By Glenn Connley co-writer Sarah Quinton

You better watch out. You better not cry. You better not pout. I'm telling you why.  
Santa is on his way to town.  
And he's got a stark message for the boys and girls of Australia - if you're not nice, you pay a price.  
Christmas joy is transactional.

The absurd reality of our modern, commercial Christmas is that we go out of our way to make poor children think they are not nice – warning them about the consequences of landing on Santa's naughty list. The reality is, no matter how good or bad little girls and boys have been this year, many will end up on Santa's 'cost of living crisis' list. While most parents will scrimp and save to provide some semblance of the Christmas which the glossy advertising and syrupy movies demand next week, others have no choice.

Hundreds of thousands of Australian children will get next to nothing this Christmas. Many parents are already skipping meals to ensure their children don't go without. There's no room in the budget for a giant turkey, glistening ham or plum pudding, let alone fancy toys. Food banks and charities can't keep up with demand. Wonderful organisations like the Salvos run Christmas drives to help keep children's belief in Santa alive for one more year.

Make no mistake, there will be children waking up on Christmas Day who will roll down the car window to see if Santa found them the night before. Many will be disappointed. Our kids are being lost into a poverty cycle, wholly because of government systems, rising interest rates, high housing costs and a lack of health and education services to meet their needs. Poverty is a relentless reality for families. Poverty at Christmas is even worse. Since Bob Hawke's 1987 pledge that 'by 1990 no child will live in poverty' Australia's child poverty rate has more than doubled, from 8 per cent to 17 per cent. And it's still rising.

In 2025, it's predicted that the real number of children living in income poverty will tip the 1 million mark. "Poverty is a public policy choice," said Matt Grudnoff, Senior Economist at The Australia Institute. "Just this week the government released its Mid Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, MYEFO, detailing billions of dollars in spending in areas it sees as priorities." "If it prioritised ending child poverty, it could do it with the stroke of a pen."

Sarah Quinton is from the [Valuing Children Initiative](#), the extraordinary organisation behind the [End Child Poverty](#) campaign. The campaign is calling on state and federal governments to value children by legislating an end to child poverty. "First, to understand and solve poverty, we need to define, measure and report levels of poverty to Parliament. We do not do this, so we do not know how to address poverty," Ms Quinton said. The second crucial element is that for children we need to see poverty from their point of view."

Page 1

Matt Grudnoff - Senior Economist at The Australia Institute | Sarah Quinton Development Executive at the Valuing Children Initiative



- 📍 [www.valuingchildreninitiative.com.au](http://www.valuingchildreninitiative.com.au)
- 📍 [www.endchildpoverty.com.au](http://www.endchildpoverty.com.au)
- ✉️ [info@valuingchildreninitiative.com.au](mailto:info@valuingchildreninitiative.com.au)

The **Australia**  
**Institute**  
Research that matters.



## EVEN ON THE 'NICE LIST,' MANY KIDS WILL STILL MISS OUT THIS CHRISTMAS

**Opinion piece: The hardest time of year for children in poverty By Glenn Connley co-writer Sarah Quinton**

Tony Pietropiccolo, Founder of the Valuing Children Initiative and Chair of the End Child Poverty campaign says “children don’t pay tax. They can’t vote. They can’t get a mortgage and they certainly can’t be blamed for wasting their hard-earned on smashed avo’, because they don’t make any hard-earned”. “This makes them invisible to the government which still defines poverty using the 50-year-old Henderson poverty line, a tunnel vision method that ignores, wellbeing, relationships and most of all, love.”

Professor Sharon Bessell from ANU spoke to more than 130 Australian children through extensive workshops over a two-year period, developed the More for Children framework, which sees child poverty through three frames: material, opportunity and relationships. Children experience poverty by their relationships: friendships lost when they have to move schools because their parents are priced out of the rental market. Children can also recognise lost opportunities in life that their friends enjoy: school excursions, camps or support with their learning needs. And children see poverty in material basics: food, shoes, housing and school supplies. Children have told Professor Bessell they are aware they are living in poverty, and they acutely know the difference between a ‘want’ and a ‘need’. Left long enough, these frames of poverty start to affect a child’s mental health. Being on Santa’s nice list doesn’t cut through that kind of pain.

“If your parents are trying their best and you’re also invisible to the system, where else do you turn?” Ms Quinton said. “Kids this Christmas will just be grateful for a small gift, let alone all the trimmings.”

In June this year, The Australia Institute published a report, [Ending Child Poverty in Australia](#), which concluded that poverty is a government choice.

During the COVID pandemic, the Commonwealth government lifted more than half a million Australians out of poverty by supplementing existing welfare payments.

“In New South Wales alone, the coronavirus supplement lifted 8,000 children out of poverty,” Mr Grudnoff said. “When the government phased the supplement out when the pandemic ended, poor families were back where they started.” “New Zealand legislated to reduce child poverty by 10 percent over 10 years. It is on track to achieve this goal. We could do the same.” “Helping those doing it toughest in society would be popular, too.”

New South Wales Council of Services Social’s [economic modelling](#) concluded that child poverty is costing that state \$60 billion a year.

The Ending Child Poverty in Australia report included polling which revealed 83% of Australians want the government to measure and report poverty rates in Australia. 81% supported setting income support payments in a way which ensured no child lived in poverty. If the government does nothing, another generation of Australian kids will be consigned to poverty.

Page 2

Matt Grudnoff - Senior Economist at The Australia Institute | Sarah Quinton Development Executive at the Valuing Children Initiative



📍 [www.valuingchildreninitiative.com.au](http://www.valuingchildreninitiative.com.au)

📍 [www.endchildpoverty.com.au](http://www.endchildpoverty.com.au)

✉️ [info@valuingchildreninitiative.com.au](mailto:info@valuingchildreninitiative.com.au)

The **Australia**  
**Institute**  
Research that matters.